

# ELKRIDGE PATCH

## County's Environmental Experts to Review, Report On Impacts of Train-Truck Facility

The Environmental Sustainability Board will help the county navigate findings of a federal process as they pertain to Hanover, Jessup sites.

By Elizabeth Janney | June 7, 2011

The county council unanimously voted on Monday for the Environmental Sustainability Board to help local officials understand reports about potential impacts of having an intermodal facility in Howard County.

Two of the four sites under consideration for the train-truck facility in central Maryland are in Howard County—one is in Hanover (Race/Hanover Roads) and the other is in Jessup (Montevideo Road near Dorsey Run Road).

The cargo transfer station, which would allow trains and trucks to swap cargo, is a \$150 million public-private partnership between CSX and the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT).

Development of such a facility requires a federally mandated environmental assessment called the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Initially, the Howard County Council proposed that the Environmental Sustainability Board generate its own assessments; however, the amended resolution states that the board will serve in an advisory role to interpret the NEPA reports, which will begin rolling out over the next 12 months.

"[The resolution] asks the sustainability board to review the statements and the assessments that are developed through the NEPA process and then report back to the council, prioritize the findings...identify any deficiencies and make any other recommendations or comments that the board feels is necessary," said Councilwoman Courtney Watson, who proposed the bill and whose district includes the Hanover site.

Currently, CSX and MDOT have developed 23 categories called "environmental and community considerations" like "air quality" and "safety and security" that they are using to evaluate the four sites.

“A handful of board members have varying levels of NEPA experience,” said Joshua Feldmark, executive secretary of the board and Director of the Office of Sustainability for the county. The all-volunteer board has approximately 15 members. “Their experience ranges from being integral drafters of [NEPA] statements to ‘on-the-ground’ scientists collecting the data, to outside interpreters of the assessments/impact statements.”

CSX and MDOT said they anticipate the NEPA process will take 9 to 12 months and begin at the end of summer. It is not clear when the data will start coming in about the sites.

According to Bradley Smith of MDOT, currently officials have “started due diligence” and are “reaching out to resources.”

On Monday evening, Smith explained to the Jessup Improvement Association that many reports—about topics like grading—are already on file with different county and state agencies. Now, MDOT and CSX are working to gather that information.

In other cases, he said, officials may need to call upon officials like the Army Corps of Engineers to study areas such as wetlands. “The first step is to get the existing information,” said Smith. Then, he said, officials would begin working on the rest.

While Hanover residents have reported seeing traffic counters in their neighborhood within the past month, those were for an “unrelated issue,” said Jack Cahalan, spokesman for MDOT.

“MDOT has not conducted any field work,” Cahalan added.

CSX spokesman Bob Sullivan also said that his company was not conducting field work either.